DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 533 SP 030 328

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TITLE Virginia Teacher Education Study 1986-1988. Executive Summary.
PUB DATE Jun 88
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *Graduate Surveys; *Program Effectiveness; Program Improvement; Student Teaching; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education Programs

ABSTRACT

A summary is presented of a study that solicited perceptions and recommendations from recent graduates of state-supported colleges and universities on undergraduate teacher education in Virginia. Interviews were conducted with 100 teachers who had completed one full year of teaching and their principals. Interviews were also held with 70 teachers who had completed three years of teaching and their principals. The participants were asked to rate the teachers on how well their preparation had enabled them to perform in their present job. The final survey question was an open-ended inquiry as to what is the greatest need for change in teacher education. Responses indicated perceived needs to be: (1) earlier field experiences; (2) greater emphasis on classroom management; (3) a longer period of student teaching; (4) closer ties between colleges and public schools; (5) a better blend of theory and practice; and (6) improvement in communication skills and planning. (JD)

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Virginia Teacher Education Study
1986-1988

Executive Summary

June, 1988

To the 340 Virginia teachers and principals
whose professionalism and dedication
harbor well for the future of public
education in the Commonwealth.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I. Overview

The Virginia Teacher Education Study was funded by the General Assembly during the 1986 session. Its purpose was to solicit perceptions and recommendations on undergraduate teacher education in the Commonwealth from recent graduates of state-supported colleges and universities. Views also were sought from each teacher's principal. It is believed that this feature, coupled with the interview procedures, made this study the first of its kind. Involved were graduates of Christopher Newport College, James Madison University, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

During the 1986-87 school year, one-on-one, on-site interviews were conducted with 100 teachers and 100 principals. The teachers had completed one full year of teaching. In 1987-88 interviews were held with 70 teachers who had completed three years of teaching and their 70 principals. The original plan for the study called for interviewing seventh-year teachers during 1988-89. After the decision was made to curtail the study to two years, it was necessary to limit the second year interviews to 70 in order to have sufficient funding available to print and disseminate this report.

After reviewing the various survey techniques available, it was decided to conduct one-on-one, on-site interviews with all interviewing done by the Director, Dr. Henry I. Willett, Jr. This procedure allowed interviewees to fully amplify and expound on questions asked and to seek clarification where needed. The decision was made to have all interviews conducted by one investigator in order to provide as much consistency as possible to the study.

Graduates were selected on a random basis from computer printouts provided by the Department of Education. Numbers were selected from each of the participating institutions in proportion to their number of graduates going into teaching.

In order to assist the investigator in overall planning and questionnaire design, each participating institution appointed a faculty representative to serve on a Planning Committee. They included Dr. Michael D. Davis, VCU; Dr. John W. Dickens, JMU; and Mr. John E. Jenkins, CNC. Mrs. Byrd Latham represented the Department of Education, and Dr. Judith D. Whittemore, Superintendent of York County Schools, the division superintendents. Their willingness to give of their time and talent was instrumental in the smooth progression of the study.

Special recognition also should be given to Dr. S. John Davis, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Deputy Superintendent,

Dr. E. B. Howerton, Jr. Their support produced an unparalleled level of participation. Among teachers and principals contacted to be interviewed, all on an optional basis, none refused. Dr. John Casteen, former Secretary of Education of the Commonwealth, was a moving force in the early stages of the development of the study. The administration at Christopher Newport College, including Presidents John E. Anderson and Anthony R. Santoro, and particularly Dean Robert J. Durel and Mrs. Michelle Thomas, provided both moral and logistical backing.

Finally, of course, was the funding authorized by the General Assembly of Virginia. While the entire Assembly should be thanked for their generous support, several individuals must be identified for their special efforts. These include Senator Hunter B. Andrews, Delegate Alan A. Diamonstein, Delegate V. Earl Dickinson, and Delegate Lacey E. Putney.

On the pages that follow, an effort has been made to pull together the most significant findings of the study. It must be stressed that this paper is but a summary. For those individuals and institutions who might wish to review the study in more detail, the Director will be happy to come and meet with you in the months ahead.

The timing of this report is particularly fortuitous because teacher education is in the public view as perhaps never before. It is hoped that the study findings will provide some assistance to those who face the important tasks of considering and implementing changes in existing programs. Particular attention is called to the final section, F. on page 8, in which principals were asked why teachers fail. Their responses appear to have a number of implications.

If we believe that there are values to be derived from the process as well as the results, then we must note that 340 Virginia educators were given an opportunity to present their views. Significant numbers commented on the importance of securing continuing input from practitioners.

II. Tabulation of Questionnaire Responses

As was noted in the preceding section, the information contained in this report is a summary as opposed to an all-inclusive compliation. Editorial discretion has been used to present those portions of the questionnaire results which would appear to be of the greatest general interest. Several editorial comments, identified as such, also have been included where deemed necessary. Procedurally the results for each of the two years will be shown separately. The reader should keep in mind that 100 teachers and 100 principals were interviewed in 1986-87 and 70 teachers and 70 principals in 1987-88.

A. Basic Information

1986-87 Teachers		1987-88 Teachers	
Male	22	Male	15
Female	78	Female	55
Black	6	Black	4
White	94	White	66
Elementary	44	Elementary	35
Middle	21	Middle	15
Secondary	35	Secondary	20

In 1986-87, of the 100 teachers initially selected, 28 were no longer teaching in the same school system after one year. Five were traced to other Virginia school divisions leaving 23 of the original 100 no longer teaching in Virginia public schools. It is not known if any of the 23 remain in teaching either outside of Virginia or in the private sector.

In 1987-88 twelve of the 70 teachers were no longer teaching in the same school division after three years. Two were found to be teaching in other Virginia school systems and one overseas.

Editorial Comment I: A 23% attrition rate for teachers after one year and 13% (70÷9) for teachers after three years both run higher than the commonly published national figures of 6-9% for the entire teaching force. In attempting to secure overall Virginia attrition figures from both the Department of Education and the Virginia Education Association, it was indicated that no studies of this type have been compiled. A number of individual school divisions were contacted in regard to their attrition rate. Their answers ranged from 8.9 to 12%. It should be noted that any attrition study must involve the use of similar definitions and criteria for all participants.

Editorial Comment II: Although the sample sizes in the study are small, they do point to the major problem of attracting minorities to the teaching profession. The problem is particularly acute in reference to Black males.

1986-87 Principals		1987-88 Principals	
Black	19	Black	12
White	81	White	58
Male	75	Male	44
Female	25	Female	26
Female Levels		Female Levels	
Elementary	16	Elementary	20
Middle	5	Middle	4
Secondary	4	Secondary	2

Highest Degree		Highest Degree	
Masters	63	Masters	56
Ed.S. or CAS	26	Ed.S. or CAS	8
Doctorate	11	Doctorate	6

Editorial Coment III: A number of national predictions have indicated a 50% or higher attrition and/or retirement rate for building principals over the next ten years. It should be noted that women do not occupy principalships to the degree that they hold the teaching positions.

B. Competencies

Teachers were asked to self rate how well their preparation enables them to perform on a scale of 5 (best) to 1 (lowest) in each of the 14 competency areas used in the BTAP program. Principals were asked to make the same judgment. These competencies are presented below. Beside each is the <u>average</u> score assigned.

	1986-87		1987-88	
	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
1. Your knowledge of the importance of maximizing academic learning time.	4.17	4.01	4.37	4.31
2. Your knowledge of the importance of learner accountability.	3.98	4.00	4.27	4.26
3. Your knowledge of the importance of clarity in the structure of a simple lesson or unit.	4.43	4.03	4.49	4.27
4. Your knowledge of the importance of adapting to individual differences.	4.16	3.90	4.39	4.16
5. Your knowledge of the importance of formal and informal evaluation.	3.90	3.44	3.94	4.01
6. Your knowledge of the importance of rules that are consistently enforced.	4.20	4.10	4.49	4.30
7. Your knowledge of the importance of the affective climate of the classroom.	4.20	4.17	4.33	4.27
8. Your knowledge of the importance of enhancing learners' self-concepts.	4.39	4.30	4.46	4.39
9. Your knowledge of the importance of meaningful learning activities.	4.14	4.03	4.44	3.87
10. Your knowledge of the importance of planning decisions.	4.13	3.95	4.30	4.16
11. Your knowledge of the importance of skillful questioning.	3.95	3.75	4.09	4.07
12. Your knowledge of reinforcement theory and its application to classroom teaching.	4.11	3.78	4.24	4.10
13. Your knowledge of the importance of close supervision of learners when they are working as individuals, in small groups or whole groups.	4.29	3.93	4.31	4.26
14. Your knowledge of the importance of being aware of what is going on all over the classroom.	4.42	4.01	4.49	4.30

C. How well were the teachers prepared to teach when they began?

	1986-87		1987-88	
Rating	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
5	23	15	12	15
4	52	62	26	24
3	23	20	21	14
2	2	2	10	5
1	1	1	1	2
Average Rating	3.96	3.68	3.54	3.21

D. Teacher Comments on Individual Courses

Most Helpful Courses:

General Education - English Composition, Writing, Speech and Public Speaking, General and Adolescent Psychology.

Professional Education - Student Teaching, Practicums, Student Observation, Reading.

Least Helpful Courses:

General Education - Economics, Advanced Math, Western Civilization.

Professional Education - Philosophy of Education, Tests and Measurements.

Courses to Add:

General Education - Computer Literacy, Communication Skills, Personal Finance, Typing.

Professional Education - Classroom Management, School Routine, Teaching the Exceptional Learner, Evaluation, Legal Issues. Dealing with Parents, Changing Family Structure.

Editorial Comment IV: The wide range of answers did not lend itself to quantifying these results. Likewise, the range in majors made it impossible to compile meaningful listings for courses relating to each major. Courses are listed in the order of frequency in which they were mentioned. Courses listed as least helpful in General Education were generally criticized for the way they were taught rather than the content. Tests and Measurements was criticized for placing too great an emphasis on standardized testing rather than teacher-made instruments. In the listing of courses to add professionally, recommendations were for units rather than separate courses for legal issues, working with parents, and changing family structure.

E. Should Teacher Education be Extended beyond the Current Four Years?

	1986-87		1987-88	
	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
No.	73	60	56	51
Yes, with a fifth year working and being paid but with major support from campus and school systems.	4	26	6	14
Yes, with a fifth year on campus.	23	14	8	5

Comments made in expanding upon the answer included in descending order of frequency: A fifth year would drive potential teachers away from the profession because of time and cost; a fifth year would impact negataively upon impending teacher shortages; and the value of a Master's degree in the fifth year is sharply curtailed when the individual has no teaching experience to relate to classroom activities.

F. Goals and Objectives

1986-87

1. Seventy-nine teachers indicated that when they entered teaching in the fall of 1985, they viewed it as a permanent career choice while 21 viewed it as temporary.

2. When interviewed during the 1986-87 school year, 76 stated teaching was still a permanent career choice while 24 felt it was temporary.

3. When asked if they would leave teaching in the near future, 8 said yes, 45 stated they would remain at least five years, 40 stated they would remain until retirement, and 7 said they would remain until retirement but preferably in an administrative or supervisory position.

1987-88

1. Fifty-one teachers indicated that when they entered teaching in the fall of 1984, they viewed it as a permanent career choice while 19 viewed it as temporary.

2. When interviewed during the 1987-88 school year, 45 stated teaching was still a permanent career choice while 25 felt it was temporary.

3. When asked if they would leave teaching in the near future, 14 said yes, 16 stated they would remain at least five years, 37 stated they would remain until retirement, and 3 said they would remain until retirement but preferably in an administrative or supervisory position.

   For those who indicated they plan to leave in the near future, low compensation, both current and projected, was cited as the principal factor in the decision. This was followed by concern over the public's poor perception of the teaching profession.

III. Summary Comments

The final question asked each teacher and principal was an open-ended inquiry as to what did they see as the greatest current need for change in teacher preparation. Those responses are summarized below. A number of the areas or topics identified either repeat or overlap answers to other questions posed in the interviews. They were, however, expressed at the conclusion of the interview and would appear to reflect the major concerns of the participants. It should be noted that some individuals listed only one concern while a number gave anywhere from two to a half dozen. Although the open-ended nature of the question did not always lend itself to quantification, the number of interviewees noting a specific response is given in several instances where it appeared to be particularly significant. The numbers given reflect responses of teachers and principals combined. It also must be borne in mind that in 1986-87 there were 100 teachers and 100 principals interviewed. In 1987-88 the totals were 70 of each.

A. Sixty-seven participants in 1986-87 and 45 in 1987-88 called for early hands-on experiences for prospective teachers. Early observation also is critical, but perspective teachers need actual work with groups and later with a class. The early observations should have some structure. Many noted the importance of the early experiences in helping the individual determine if he/she really wanted to teach.

B. Forty-two participants in 1986-87 and 33 in 1987-88 stated that classroom management must receive a greater emphasis in teacher preparation programs. Many further pointed out that the quality of instruction declines rapidly as classroom control diminishes.

C. Sixty-four participants in 1986-87 and 48 in 1987-88 called for an increase in the length of student teaching with the majority favoring a full semester. Twenty-one in 1986-87 and 20 in 1987-88 specifically called for student teachers to experience preschool and school opening activities as a means of helping their own orientation and induction the

following year. Many also called for student teachers to be brought together for both sharing and pulling together activities. Student teachers should work with students of varied socioeconomic and ability levels. A call was made for greater care in the selection of cooperating teachers. Also noted was a need for greater consistency in the supervision of student teachers, both by cooperating and college personnel. It was further suggested that principals observe student teachers.

Editorial Comment V: The problems of beginning teachers were seen to be particularly acute and participants spoke to the need to review the teaching assignments for first year teachers. Many noted floating, unusually high numbers of preparations, and having the most difficult students as the norm for those perhaps the least able to cope with such problems.

D. Thirty-six participants in 1986-87 and 26 in 1987-88 called for the development of closer ties between the colleges and the public schools.

E. Fifty-four participants in 1986-87 and 47 in 1987-88 noted a need to better blend theory with actual practice in teacher preparation programs. Forty-one in 1986-87 and 32 in 1987-88 suggested that the colleges and universities call upon experienced public school teachers and administrators to complement instruction by college faculty.

F. In 1986-87 a number of principals made comments in the summary as to why they believed teachers failed. As a result, an additional question was asked of principals in 1987-88 as the final question in the interview. They were specifically asked to indicate the major reason they felt some teachers failed as teachers. Those responses are broken into elementary and secondary categories.

Major Cause	Elementary	Secondary
Inability to successfully manage their students	28	19
Poor organization and planning	3	4
Inability to work with peers	2	5
Lack of good communication skills	1	5
Inability to work with parents	1	2
	35	35

Although asked to list only the single major cause, several did give second and even third causes for failure. All of the second and third reasons came from the above five major

causes with the exception of two secondary principals who listed lack of content knowledge as a second reason for teacher failure.